

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Great Falls West Bank Historic District

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: 300 and 400 blocks, 3rd Street NW

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Great Falls

vicinity: n/a

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Cascade

code: 013

zip code: 59404

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 removed from the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Name of Property: Great Falls West Bank Historic District

County and State: Cascade County, Montana

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private; Public-local

Category of Property: District

Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>6</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>6</u>	<u>0</u> Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

COMMERCE: Bar
GOVERNMENT: Public works
DOMESTIC: Single dwelling
RECREATION & CULTURE: Museum
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: Manufacturing facility

Current Functions:

COMMERCE: Bar
GOVERNMENT: Public works
DOMESTIC: Single dwelling
RECREATION & CULTURE: Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco
LATE 19th AND EARLY 20th CENTURY
MOVEMENTS: Bungalow/Craftsman
Other: Rustic

Materials:

foundation: Concrete
walls: Brick, Weatherboard, Log
roof: Asphalt
other:

Narrative Description

(see continuation sheet)

Name of Property: Great Falls West Bank Historic District

County and State: Cascade County, Montana

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
SOCIAL HISTORY

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1923-1960

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1923, 1940, 1941
Architect/Builder: National Youth Administration

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Narrative Statement of Significance

(see continuation sheet)

Name of Property: Great Falls West Bank Historic District

County and State: Cascade County, Montana

9. Major Bibliographic References

(see continuation sheet)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Approximately three acres.

UTM References: Zone 12 Easting 476210 Northing 5262020

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): Section 2, T20N, R3E, M.P.M.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary begins at the northeast corner of 3rd Street NW and 3rd Avenue NW. It then runs in an approximate northerly direction along the east side of 3rd Street NW a distance of approximately 550 feet, to the intersection with a line that is 25 feet north of, and parallel to, the north wall of the historic district's Feature 1. It then follows that line in an approximate east-southeasterly direction approximately 350 feet, to a fence marking the eastern boundary of the county shops complex. It then follows that fenceline, and an imaginary extension of that line, in an approximate south-southwesterly direction for approximately 350 feet to the north side of 3rd Avenue NW. It then follows the north side of 3rd Avenue NW about 325 feet in an approximate westerly direction to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is constructed to include all contributing features in the immediate area, as well as the yards, parking, and service areas historically associated with those properties. Public streets are utilized as boundaries when practical. Ineligible properties to the north and east are excluded from the district.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Mark Hufstetler
organization: Renewable Technologies, Inc.
street & number: 8 West Park Street, Suite 313
city or town: Butte state: Montana date: March 1, 2010
telephone: 406-782-0494
zip code: 59701

Property Owner

Features 1 - 2:

name/title: Cascade County
street & number: P.O. Box 2549
city or town: Great Falls state: Montana telephone: 406-454-6811
zip code: 59403-2549

Features 3 - 6:

name/title: Montana Cowboys Association
street & number: P.O. Box 584
city or town: Great Falls state: Montana telephone: 406-761-9299
zip code: 59403-0584

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Description of Resources

The Great Falls West Bank Historic District comprises a portion of a large, mixed-use area known informally as West Bank, in the city of Great Falls, Montana. As the name implies, the area is located along the west bank of the Missouri River, across the river from the central business district of Great Falls. Roughly, the area is bounded by the Missouri River on the east, Third Street NW to the west, and the former Great Northern Railway shops to the south. The historic district is near the center of the West Bank area, immediately east of Third Street NW. Montana ExpoPark (formerly the Northern Montana Fairgrounds) is across Third Street to the west.

Though never as densely developed as the nearby urban core of Great Falls, the West Bank vicinity has seen significant and varied uses since the first urban settlement of the city in the early 1880s. Portions of the West Bank have served as a railway and roadway transportation corridor since the late 1880s, and the railroad spurs crossing the area made much of the area desirable for heavy commercial and industrial use. Other locations saw limited residential use throughout the area's history, with additional residential neighborhoods farther to the west. Finally, improved street and highway development in the 1930s and beyond attracted retail and entertainment enterprises to the West Bank, further encouraged by the construction of the Northern Montana Fairgrounds just to the west.

This strong, traditional diversity of use continues in the West Bank in the early twenty-first century, and is reflected in the area's cultural landscape. A spur line now operated by the BNSF Railway passes through the West Bank and serves a handful of major industries. A growing number of retail businesses operate in the area, and a small number of residences remain. Cascade County's former shop facility also occupies a prominent tract of West Bank land. Other West Bank properties are being redeveloped, and the area now includes a new federal courthouse and large hotel property.

The West Bank Historic District includes a contiguous grouping of six historic buildings reflecting this diversity of use, including a large publicly owned warehouse facility, surviving buildings from the area's largest early industrial development, an early twentieth-century residence, and a building housing one of the city's best-known bars and museums. All of the buildings are considered contributing resources, and each is described separately below:

The WPA Warehouse Building, at 415 3rd Street NW (Feature 1; contributing) was constructed in 1940 as an operations base for Works Progress Administration (WPA) activities in central Montana; in later years it served as a shop facility for the Cascade County Bridge Department. It is a large rectangular building constructed on an approximate north-south axis, measuring about 141 feet long and 78 feet wide. The warehouse rests on a concrete foundation. Exterior walls are bearing brick, laid in a common bond. The building has a barrel roof, supported by a series of nine steel trusses, running east-west. The roof is surfaced with rolled asphalt roofing. Shallow buttresses in the east and west walls help support the trusses, and articulate those walls into eight regularly-spaced bays.

The north and south elevations display much of the building's limited Art Deco architectural detail. These elevations were historically identical, and feature round-top parapet walls. A garage door opening is centered on each elevation; two shallow, decorative buttresses exist on each side of the garage opening, and extend upward to partially bracket a bank of three windows above the door. The concrete caps atop these buttresses provide additional detail, as do two bands of projecting brick above the door level. Person doors exist both east and west of each garage door. The garage doors are modern overhead metal units; person doors are metal, and were installed at an unknown date.

Banks of windows exist in each of the bays on both the east and west elevations. All are historic, metal-framed units. A typical configuration is a bank of 12 lights (4 rows of 3), with the two center rows comprising a hinged unit. These banks exist individually in some bays, and in groups of four in others. The windows over the garage doors were 9-light units; those on the north elevation survive, but those on the south have been infilled with metal.

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The Sunburst Oil Blacksmith Shop (Feature 2; contributing) was originally constructed as part of the large Sunburst Oil Refinery complex, which once dominated the central West Bank area. The construction date of the building is not documented, but it may have been as early as 1923, when the refinery began operations. The refinery closed in 1933, and the building later became part of the Cascade County Shop complex. The building is vernacular and roughly square, and consists of three separate structural masses. The approximate southern third of the building has brick walls and an east west gable roof. To the north of the brick mass are two similarly-sized north-south masses joined side-by-side, each with a north-south gable roof. This gives the full roofline an "M" profile when viewed from the north. The northerly masses are wood-framed, and have pressed metal exterior cladding scored to simulate brickwork. All of the building masses are above a concrete foundation, and all roof surfaces are covered with rolled asphalt.

The overall fenestration pattern of the blacksmith shop appears to be historic, and most doors and windows are likely original. The brick building mass is marked by a series of garage door openings which retain their historic doors; each opening holds a pair of two-part, hinged wood doors. Most windows are wood-framed, 6-over-6 double-hung. A large garage opening on the north elevation holds a modern pair of large, plywood doors.

The building is located just east of the Feature 1 warehouse, and shares its address.

The Cowboys Bar and Museum Building, at 311 3rd Street NW (Feature 3; contributing) is a Rustic Style building constructed in 1941 by the National Youth Administration to serve as home for the Montana Cowboys Association, a local civic and fraternal group. The building includes an historic core constructed of uniformly shaped round logs, as well as several wood-framed and log additions. These additions have significantly enlarged the building over the years, but mostly at the building's rear (east) elevation. The entire building rests on a concrete foundation, and has an asphalt-shingle roof.

The building's original core is comprised of three interconnected log pens aligned basically north-south along the street. Wall logs at each pen are joined at the corners with saddle notches, and the tips have a decorative, tapered cut. Each of the three pens is 20 feet long in the north-south dimension, and the two outer pens originally measured 20 feet in the east-west dimension. The center pen was narrower, giving the original building a U-shaped plan with a recessed, central entry bay. A side gable roof covers the center pen, and the side pens each have a front gable roof. All three roofs have log purlins and rafters, and open eaves with wide overhangs. Extended beam and rafter tips are exposed under the overhangs.

The front façade of the original log core shows some modifications, although the historic appearance of the façade remains strongly evident. The original recessed entry is now partially enclosed by a shed roof and vertical board wall siding. Completed in 1964, this enclosure houses the building's bathrooms. A newer metal-sash glass door is centered on its facade. Large log-framed window openings are still present on the facades of the two side pens (one each). The original cottage-like windows with sidelights and transoms, all divided by log muntins, remain evident, although the original windows have been removed. All of the panes at the south window have been boarded, while the north window has been fitted with a smaller metal-sash window and log infill and its transoms boarded. These window modifications occurred in 1977.

The side walls (north and south) of the original north and south pens are both marked by a central, fireplace chimney flanked on both sides by a long narrow window openings set high in the wall. The two fireplace chimneys are both tall, rubblestone masonry structures. Each extends through the roof eaves. All four window openings are divided into three lights by log muntins. The former glazing areas have been infilled with wood.

Additions now cover the entire rear elevation of the building's original log core. The oldest of those rear additions is toward the north end of the building, or on back of the north log pen. Constructed in 1958, it is a 24-foot square wood-frame structure with a concrete foundation and a gable roof. Exterior walls have 8-inch board siding. There is a metal door on the north wall of this addition, and a boarded window on the south.

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The second rear addition is a log pen built onto the original south log pen in 1977. It closely replicates its early counterpart in design and materials, having shaped round wall logs, saddle corner notching, extended log tips cut to taper, and a gable roof with wide open eaves and exposed log beams and pole rafters. This addition measures 20 x 24 feet. An entry on the north elevation holds a modern replacement door clad in metal.

There are two recent additions on the rear elevation of the central log pen, which together fill the formerly open area (14-foot wide by 24-foot long) between the 1958 (north) and 1977 (south) additions. Constructed in 2003, the first of these houses a walk-in-cooler (14 by 12 feet). Only the shed roof of this wood-frame structure remains visible, with its east wall now obscured behind the newer recent addition. The later also is a wood-framed, shed-roofed structure (14 by 12 feet). The east (exposed) wall has vertical pressed board siding and a wood door.

The William and Isabel Shea House, at 305 3rd Street NW (Feature 4; contributing) is a single-story residence displaying strong Craftsman design elements. It was built in 1929 for William Shea, a city employee best remembered as a driving force behind the establishment of the Montana Cowboys Association. The building has a modified rectangular mass, and faces west. The foundation is concrete, and exterior walls are brick, laid in a common bond. Most of the brickwork has been painted yellow. The house has a clipped-gable roof, detailed with exposed rafter tips and surfaced with wood shingles. Gable ends are stucco. A brick chimney pierces the north gable face. Windows are wood-framed, and all appear to be historic; double-hung windows with four vertical lights over a single light predominate. Window openings are marked by brick lintel courses and brick sills.

An enclosed front porch occupies the approximate southern two-thirds of the west elevation. It is accessed by brick steps to the north, and features prominent brick corner posts. A continuous bank of 15-light windows runs the width of the porch. There is some modern infill around the entry door, and the door itself is non-historic. There is also a fully-enclosed rear porch, accessed by a brick stoop.

The Sunburst Oil Office, at 216 4th Avenue NW (Feature 5; contributing) was probably constructed in 1923, in conjunction with the development of the adjacent Sunburst Oil Refinery. The building was converted to a residence at some point after the refinery's 1933 closure, and it continues to serve that function. The house faces north, toward 4th Avenue Northwest. A small yard lined by mature conifers and bushes gives the property a distinct residential character in an otherwise industrial corridor. The immediate site setting is further enhanced by an historic-age white picket fence running along the yard's front (north) and eastern perimeters.

The building is a one-story structure of brick masonry construction. While it first saw use as an office, the building likely presented a house-like appearance from the beginning. With a somewhat square-shaped plan (23 feet by 31 feet) and prominent hip roof, it is reminiscent of a foursquare cottage in form and massing. Other building details are reminiscent of the Craftsman architectural style. The foundation is rough-cut stone masonry, now partially covered by a thin veneer of stucco. The hip roof has a short center ridge, open eaves with wide overhangs, and exposed rafter tips. It is surfaced with asphalt shingles.

The front (north) façade displays very symmetrical fenestration. The main entry is centered on the wall; it is flanked by paired window sets (one each side). All three openings have segmental brick arch headers and brick sills. An historic, half-light paneled-wood door remains at the entry. Windows are original one-over-one double-hung units with wooden sashes and modern metal-framed storms. Both sets of windows feature historic wooden flower boxes supported by small Craftsman knee braces. A small open porch fronts the main entry. It has a crudely built replacement deck and railings made of boards and posts. The original clipped-gable roof remains, supported on large Craftsman knee braces.

Fenestration elsewhere is also symmetrical. Paired double-hung windows likewise predominate. A vestibule is found on the east elevation, centered between two sets of windows. It has clapboard wall siding, a clipped-gable roof with extended eaves, a modern

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screen door at the entry, and a pair of wood-sash fixed windows on both the north and south elevations. A short shed-roofed hood is above the entry.

A **garage** (Feature 6; contributing) stands to the south of the Feature 5 building. It is an historic-age garage which was moved to this property from another location at an unknown date, though it has been at this location for some time. The design and materials of the garage are suggestive of construction in the 1920s or 1930s. It is a shed roofed, wood-frame building wide enough to accommodate a single car. Exterior walls sport original, 4-inch drop siding. Low parapets rise from the roofline on the front (north) façade and two side elevations. The front parapet has a long, flat step at the center. A pair of outswinging-type garage doors is on the front façade. These doors are constructed of drop siding and board X-bracing. The west elevation has a person door, also made of drop siding. The rear (south) has the only window, a wood-sash fixed unit with 2 x 3 lights. The roof is surfaced with rolled asphalt material. No foundation is readily visible.

Overall, the buildings in the West Bank Historic District retain a high level of integrity in all aspects. All but the feature 6 garage remain at their original location, and all retain an appearance strongly evocative of their period of construction. Original exterior cladding survives throughout, and all historic fenestration patterns remain intact or evident. All buildings except feature 3 retain their historic massing; the additions to feature 3 are largely at the rear of the building and of compatible materials, and do not significantly detract from the building's historic appearance.

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Introduction

The West Bank Historic District includes six well-preserved buildings that together display a functional and architectural historic cross-section of a unique area of the city of Great Falls, Montana. Since the city's founding in the 1880s, the West Bank has been home to a diverse collection of mixed uses – industrial, transportation-related, commercial, industrial, and governmental – forming a distinctive but often-overlooked cultural landscape within the broader urban setting. These activities, dependent on diverse, seemingly incompatible land uses building styles, have successfully shared a setting for over 125 years. The buildings within the district boundary are highly representative of this variety of historic uses, as well as the building types that were historically constructed in support of these uses.

The West Bank Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, with local significance under criteria "A" and "C." Its period of significance begins in 1923, the date of construction of the earliest surviving building in the area, and extends to 1960, which is the current 50-year cut-off date for National Register eligibility. Major buildings in the district were constructed in 1923, 1940, and 1941, making those significant dates in the district's history.

Statement of Significance

The West Bank area of Great Falls has been a part of the community's urban landscape since the city's founding in the 1880s, though its pattern of development differed greatly from that of the platted townsite nearby. The West Bank's location – in close proximity to Great Falls' central business district, but separated from it by the river – heavily guided the evolution of its cultural landscape, preventing it from being an integral part of the city plat while still making it an attractive development location. This geographic influence was strengthened by early human-caused events, in particular the extensive railway construction in the area. The presence of the railroad and the physical separation from urban Great Falls made the West Bank a desirable industrial area by the early twentieth century. This industrial activity extended both north and south from the current West Bank area, from the Great Northern Railway shops complex all the way to the Boston & Montana Smelter at Black Eagle.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, the West Bank never became a purely industrial corridor. A small amount of housing existed in the area by the late nineteenth century, encouraged by the nearness of Great Falls and perhaps by low housing costs. By the 1930s, these earlier uses were joined by an increasing number of retail and civic enterprises, driven in part by the West Bank's location on a primary travel corridor into the city. This category of use became more visible as the twentieth century progressed, as automobile travel grew, the surrounding street system was improved, and as the Northern Montana Fairgrounds was developed nearby. These new business types supplemented, rather than replaced, the earlier industrial activities in the area, resulting in a cultural landscape that is both highly diverse and locally unique.

Historically, the West Bank area has a strong historic association with the city of Great Falls, and is significant in that history – albeit in ways that have been relatively little recognized in the past. The area was a primary setting for light industry throughout much of the twentieth century; it, along with the Black Eagle area to the north, were the city's most recognizable industrial areas throughout that era. Simultaneously, the area served as one of the major geographic gateways to the city, greeting those who arrived in Great Falls from the west and north and serving as a venue for commercial services geared to the automobile age. The later development of the Northern Montana Fairgrounds nearby

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strengthened this focus for the region. And meanwhile, a small number of residential properties continued to exist in the area, as they had since the nineteenth century. This strong mixing of diverse, seemingly-incompatible uses gives the West Bank a unique character – one that was not perhaps visually appealing, but that was nonetheless significant to the city of Great Falls.

Much of the West Bank area began to see significant changes late in the twentieth century, and the pace of change accelerated in the twenty-first. Consequently, the early character of much of the area has been largely lost. The building grouping contained in the West Bank Historic District represents the only remaining contiguous grouping of well-preserved historic properties in the area. This grouping clearly reflects the diversity of historic uses in the West Bank area, and suggests the variety of building styles constructed in response to those uses. In addition, the district contains the two most important historic buildings remaining in the area: the WPA Warehouse Building and the Cowboys Bar & Museum.

Historic Context

Early settlement and use of the West Bank area

The West Bank area is across the Missouri River from the original platted city of Great Falls, and was thus physically separated from much of the city's nineteenth-century residential and civic development. This combination of proximity and separation apparently made the West Bank an attractive home for some of the city's poorest and most transient early residents, though the documentation of these uses is fragmentary, at best.

The first known reference to a residence on the river's bank, although whether on the west or east side is uncertain, was Paris Gibson's account of "a half-decayed log cabin in a thick clump of willows at the water's edge."¹ He attributed the cabin, which he observed in 1882, to American Fur Company trappers. Gibson also noted that, just shortly before his 1882 visit to the future site of Great Falls, some cattlemen had erected a few log cabins "on the West side of the Missouri River, and adjacent to Sun River."²

The west bank of the Missouri River was also the site of a small settlement called Johnstown (or "John's Town"). Initially settled about 1883 and platted the following year, Johnstown was the first attempt at formal townsite development in the future Great Falls area. While the Johnstown community reportedly boasted a store, saloon, and post office during the mid-1880s, the townsite was quickly eclipsed by Great Falls and was not ultimately successful. Its precise location is not known today, although it was probably at the far south end of the West Bank study area, extending into the land that was later occupied by the Great Northern roundhouse and shops. An 1891 perspective map of Great Falls shows a collection of several houses at the river's west bank near the approximate Johnstown site. A seasonal ferry also operated for a few years in the same vicinity.³

¹ Paris Gibson, *The Founding of Great Falls* (reprint) (Great Falls: Cascade County Historical Society, 1990).

² Ibid.

³ Robison, Ken. "Johnstown, the Rival of the 'Future Great,'" *Destination Great Falls Montana* 1:2 (Winter/Spring 2009/2010), 6-8; American Publishing Company, *Perspective Map of Great Falls, Mont., 1891* (Milwaukee), accessed at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/gmd:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(g4254g+pm004540\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/gmd:@field(NUMBER+@band(g4254g+pm004540))), 12 June 2009.

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Cree Indians lived on the west bank of the Missouri River from at least the turn of the twentieth century into the late 1920s. The Great Falls Leader reported in 1904 that Chief Little Bear and his band of about 100 had returned to “the old barren Indian camping ground across the river below West Great Falls,” indicating they had stayed there several years previous as well. At that time, the Chippewa Cree were landless; they were not granted a reservation until 1916 when the small Rocky Boy Reservation was set aside between Great Falls and Havre. At least a few Cree continued to live in the area (at least intermittently) even after the reservation was established – into the 1920s, and perhaps beyond.⁴

The Cree were not the last to reside along the river at the West Bank, however. For an unknown period, but at least extending into the 1970s, that section between Central Avenue and the Great Northern Railway shops was locally known as “a hobo jungle.” Transients lived among the willows at the river’s edge until the brush was cleared to discourage transient camping.⁵ So-called hobo jungles were common at many places in the western United States at least as early as the 1930s, and it is possible that the river bank camp among the willows was decades old.

Industrial and transportation development in the area

Use of the West Bank area for industrial and transportation purposes dates from the first decade of urban development in Great Falls, and was at least in part a product of the pattern of railway construction in the area. The first railroad constructed into Great Falls was the “St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway Company,” a predecessor of the Great Northern (GN); it built from North Dakota through Havre and on to Great Falls during a marathon construction season in 1887. The line entered the Great Falls area from the north, on an alignment well west of the Missouri River, and later continued southward towards Helena and Butte. Although the railway soon built a Missouri River bridge in Great Falls to access the city proper (and perhaps more importantly, the coalfields southeast of town), the company’s shop facilities and primary yard were constructed west of the river where undeveloped land was more readily available. The GN greatly expanded its shop facilities in Great Falls during the early twentieth century, constructing a massive building complex near the west end of its Missouri River bridge, immediately south of the West Bank study area. A successor bridge and many of the railroad’s shop buildings remain there today.⁶

By 1890, the GN constructed a 5-mile spur track running northward from its Great Falls shops area to the Boston & Montana smelter site at Black Eagle. The entire spur paralleled the west bank of the Missouri River, running the length of the West Bank study area. The track saw immediate and heavy use hauling ore shipments and concentrates to and from the smelter, and made the railroad a predominate presence in the West Bank area. The railway’s West Bank land holdings extended in places well beyond the land needed for the spur itself, providing the potential for future railroad-related industrial development. Simultaneously, the GN’s strong presence in the area helped preclude subdivision or other types of development in the vicinity.

⁴ *Great Falls Leader*, 10 August 1904; Roger St. Pierre, “Testimony of Roger St. Pierre, Vice-Chairman of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy’s Reservation and Chairman of the Chippewa Cree Water Rights Negotiating Team Representing the Chippewa Cree Tribe in Support of S. 1899 – ‘The Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy’s reservation Indian Reserved Water Rights Settlement Act of 998’- Before the Senate Indian Affairs and Energy and Natural Resources Committees,” accessed at http://indian.senate.gov/1998hrsgs/0624_rp.pdf, 10 June 2009.

⁵ Richard Svedahl, Havre, telephone communication, 9 June 2009.

⁶ Hidy, Ralph W., and others, *The Great Northern Railway: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 1988), 319.

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A second railroad also arrived in the Great Falls area in 1890. The Great Falls and Canada Railway (GF&C) was a narrow-gauge line funded by Canadian interests, connecting the city with coalfields in the Lethbridge, Alberta area. Though little information about the railroad's Great Falls operations are known, the line apparently first terminated at Willard, about a mile west of the GN's yard. The GF&C entered the West Bank area directly in 1895, constructing a line eastward along the northern side of the Sun River valley, and then turning south into the West Bank area. The final stretch of this extension paralleled the GN's Black Eagle spur, and a large facility was built there to transload coal and other shipments from narrow-gauge to standard-gauge freight cars. This facility was in West Bank, probably near Central Avenue. Its period of use was relatively brief; the GF&C was converted to standard gauge on January 1, 1903, and the line was sold to the GN the following year. The original GF&C trackage in Great Falls was soon abandoned, and no trace remains of the transloading facility today.⁷

The third and final railroad constructed in the West Bank area was a predecessor company of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad ("the Milwaukee Road"), which built a line into Great Falls from the east in 1913. The railroad bridged the Missouri River at Central Avenue the following year, and constructed a network of interchange tracks with the GN in the West Bank area, primarily to allow some Black Eagle smelter shipments to be routed via the Milwaukee Road. This trackage existed until 1980, when the Milwaukee ended its local operations.⁸

Non-railway industrial development also began to take place in the West Bank area during the last years of the nineteenth century, lured both by the availability of rail transport and the abundance of undeveloped land, both in close proximity to the rapidly-expanding urban center of Great Falls. The most significant early industrial project in West Bank (south of the historic district) was the Montana Brewing Company, which was established in 1898. The company built a large, Gothic-detailed brewery on the west shore of the river just north of Central Avenue, and by 1900 was utilizing locally-grown barley to produce 200 barrels of beer a day. The building was a Great Falls landmark throughout the early twentieth century. It was largely demolished by the 1960s, and the site is now occupied by the Missouri River Federal Courthouse, completed in 2009.⁹

What was to be the largest industrial development in the West Bank area was constructed a few hundred feet to the north of the Montana Brewing Company in 1923. That year, the Sunburst Refining Company erected a large oil refining complex of stills, condensers and tanks along the GN's Black Eagle spur. Sunburst was one of three refineries erected in Great Falls following the discovery of rich high gravity oil at the Kevin-Sunburst Field, about 85 miles north of the city. The opening of the Kevin-Sunburst Field came three years on the heels of the oil discovery at Cat Creek in central Montana, the find and field that had ignited Montana's first true oil boom. Feature 2 in the historic district was constructed as part of the shop facilities for the Sunburst project, and Feature 5 originally served as the refinery's office building.

The central Montana oil boom was short-lived, however, and the Sunburst refinery closed in 1933, apparently in the face of bankruptcy. The refining plant, oil storage tanks and most other facilities were dismantled soon thereafter, although the

⁷ George W. Hilton, *American Narrow Gauge Railroads* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 436-37.

⁸ Mark Hufstetler, "Central Montana Rail: Historic and Architectural Overview." Unpublished report prepared for the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 1980.

⁹ Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor, and Industry, *Seventh Report, for the Year Ending November 30, 1900* (Helena: The Bureau, 1900), 322-323.

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two remaining historic district buildings serve as reminders of the enterprise. Other portions of the refinery area became part of the Cascade County shop complex, and saw use by a grain milling business.¹⁰

Other than the Sunburst Refinery, the Cascade County Shop complex occupied the largest single tract of land in the West Bank area. Active since the 1930s, the facility was primarily used by the county's road and bridge departments, but was also utilized by other county agencies. (Much of the property was former Sunburst Refinery land.) The primary shop building (now razed), was a large concrete structure with Art Deco detailing, built in about 1938 and located near the southeastern corner of the tract. To the west, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) constructed a similarly-sized brick building in 1939 (feature 1); this served as a warehouse and staging facility for various WPA construction projects in the region. The WPA, one of the most significant of the New Deal-era public works programs of the 1930s, was very active in the Great Falls area, undertaking numerous civic projects.

After the close of the WPA program, its Great Falls warehouse was transferred to Cascade County, becoming a key component of the county shop complex. The building reportedly was used by the county bridge department for at least a portion of its history. The adjacent blacksmith shop (built by Sunburst Oil) may have also seen use by the bridge department, until metal fabrication and repair using blacksmith techniques became less necessary. It was then used primarily for storage.

Despite this early industrial activity, much of the land in the West Bank area apparently remained undeveloped through at least the 1920s. The 1930s and 1940s, however, saw substantial small-scale industrial development in the area, primarily on railroad-owned land in the southern part of West Bank. South of Central Avenue, much of the West Bank area remained railroad-owned until late in the twentieth century, and maps of the period show a small network of railroad spur tracks serving a variety of industries built on lots leased from the GN. Many of these businesses appeared to be related to petroleum distribution. Construction firms also located in the area, and the Montana State Highway Commission built and operated a large shop complex there. By the 1940s, other industrial firms occupied land north of Central, as well. Among the endeavors was a company that manufactured corrugated-metal quonset buildings – several examples of which still exist in and near the West Bank area.

While the West Bank area remained a primarily industrial locale throughout its history, some of the land did see other use. A factor in this was the 1931 establishment of the Northern Montana Fairgrounds complex on a large tract of land just across Third Street from the West Bank area. Substantial development took place at the fairgrounds during the 1930s and beyond, drawing visitor attention to the area for the first time. This, combined with the increasing use of the automobile and the fact that US Highway 89 passed through the area (on Central Avenue) resulted in the construction of a small number of travel-related businesses in the West Bank in the mid-twentieth century, including at least one gas station, a bar, and two motels.¹¹

The West Bank's proximity to the fairgrounds may have also helped encourage the construction of what is perhaps the best-known building in the West Bank area: the Cowboys Bar and Museum (Feature 3). Constructed as a public works project in 1940 by workers for the National Youth Administration, the building is the home of the Montana Cowboys

¹⁰ Joseph Ashley, "Montana's Refining Industry, Part 1: 1920-1941," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 48 (Spring 1998): 18-43.

¹¹ "Northern Montana State Fairground Historic District," National Register of Historic Places registration form, 1989.

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Association, a well-known local fraternal group. Land for the building site was donated by William Shea, a Great Falls civic leader and the owner of an adjacent residence (Feature 4).

The Cowboys Bar and Museum has served as a museum as well as the social and organizational headquarters for the Montana Cowboys Association (MCA) for nearly 70 years. The association traces its beginnings to a reunion of former Great Falls cowhands held in 1938. Grown men by then, the attendees had in their youth earned money herding local milk cows in and out of Great Falls each day for grazing and/or driving range cattle through the city's streets. Interest in the new Montana Cowboys Association grew rapidly and, in addition to other old Great Falls cowhands, men from other parts of Montana and elsewhere clamored for membership.

In order to construct its building, the MCA sought assistance from the National Youth Association (NYA), one of several New Deal programs created by the Franklin Roosevelt Administration to provide relief for the nation's unemployed. The MCA placed a group of NYA youth at work constructing the Cowboy Museum and Bar in late 1940 or early 1941. (The architect for the building is not known.) The building was completed by late 1941 at a cost of just under \$8,500. It has been operated by the MCA ever since, both as a museum for artifacts for Montana's ranching past and (at least in later years) as a local watering hole.

Non-industrial land uses in the West Bank area remained relatively minimal, however, until well after World War II. During the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond, commercial development in Great Falls underwent a significant growth and outward expansion, the focus shifting from the historic Central Business District to more outlying areas with available land and good highway access. The northwestern portion of Great Falls was a primary beneficiary of this trend during the last third of the twentieth century, and heavy commercial growth took place in the area, particularly along the northern portion of Third Street Northwest.

This increasing urbanization was countered somewhat by a push to convert much of the immediate riverbank area to parkland, a compliment to the parks that had existed on the Missouri's eastern bank for decades. The first designated parkland in the West Bank area was Sacajawea Island (then called Gibson Island), which the Montana Department of State Lands leased to the City of Great Falls for park purposes beginning in 1931. Most of the remaining riverbank parkland in the West Bank area was deeded to the city by the Montana Power Company in 1969. The area was formally dedicated as a park in 1978, and in 1998 the former Milwaukee Road bridge across the Missouri was converted to pedestrian use, linking the parkland on the two sides of the river.¹²

By the early 21st century commercial development pressure was gradually extending southward towards former industrial properties. The establishment of the West Bank Urban Renewal District promises to accelerate this trend. The first major construction projects associated with the creation of the district – the new federal courthouse and a large hotel building – have already significantly changed the character of a portion of West Bank. Further changes seem assured, and it is likely that much of the area's remaining industrial landscape will soon be greatly altered.

¹² CTA LandWorks Group, *Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan*, report prepared for the City of Great Falls, 2004; deed transactions recorded at Roll 62, pages 7972 and 7973, Cascade County Clerk & Recorder Office, Great Falls, Montana.

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Name of Property:	West Bank Historic District
City or Vicinity:	Great Falls
County:	Cascade
State:	Montana
Name of Photographer:	Mark Hufstetler
Date of Photographs:	May 2009
Location of Original Digital Files:	8 West Park Street #313, Butte, MT 59701



Photo #1 (MT_CascadeCounty_WestBankHD_0001)
WPA Warehouse Building (24CA1387, feature 1): south elevation. View to northeast.

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Photo #2 (MT_CascadeCounty_WestBankHD_0002)
Sunburst Oil Blacksmith Shop building (24CA1387, feature 2): north elevation. View to south.



Photo #3 (MT_CascadeCounty_WestBankHD_0003)
Cowboys Bar and Museum (24CA1389), front façade and south elevation. View to northeast.

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Photo #4 (MT_CascadeCounty_WestBankHD_0004)
William & Elizabeth Shay House (24CA1390), west and south elevations. View to northeast.



Photo #5 (MT_CascadeCounty_WestBankHD_0005)
Sunburst Oil Office (24CA1388): front (north) façade. View to south.

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Photo #6 (MT_CascadeCounty_WestBankHD_0006)
Garage at former Sunburst Oil Office (24CA1388). View to south.



Photo #7 (MT_CascadeCounty_WestBankHD_0007)
Cowboys Bar and Museum (24CA1389), and William & Elizabeth Shay House (24CA1390), front façades and north elevations.
View to southeast.

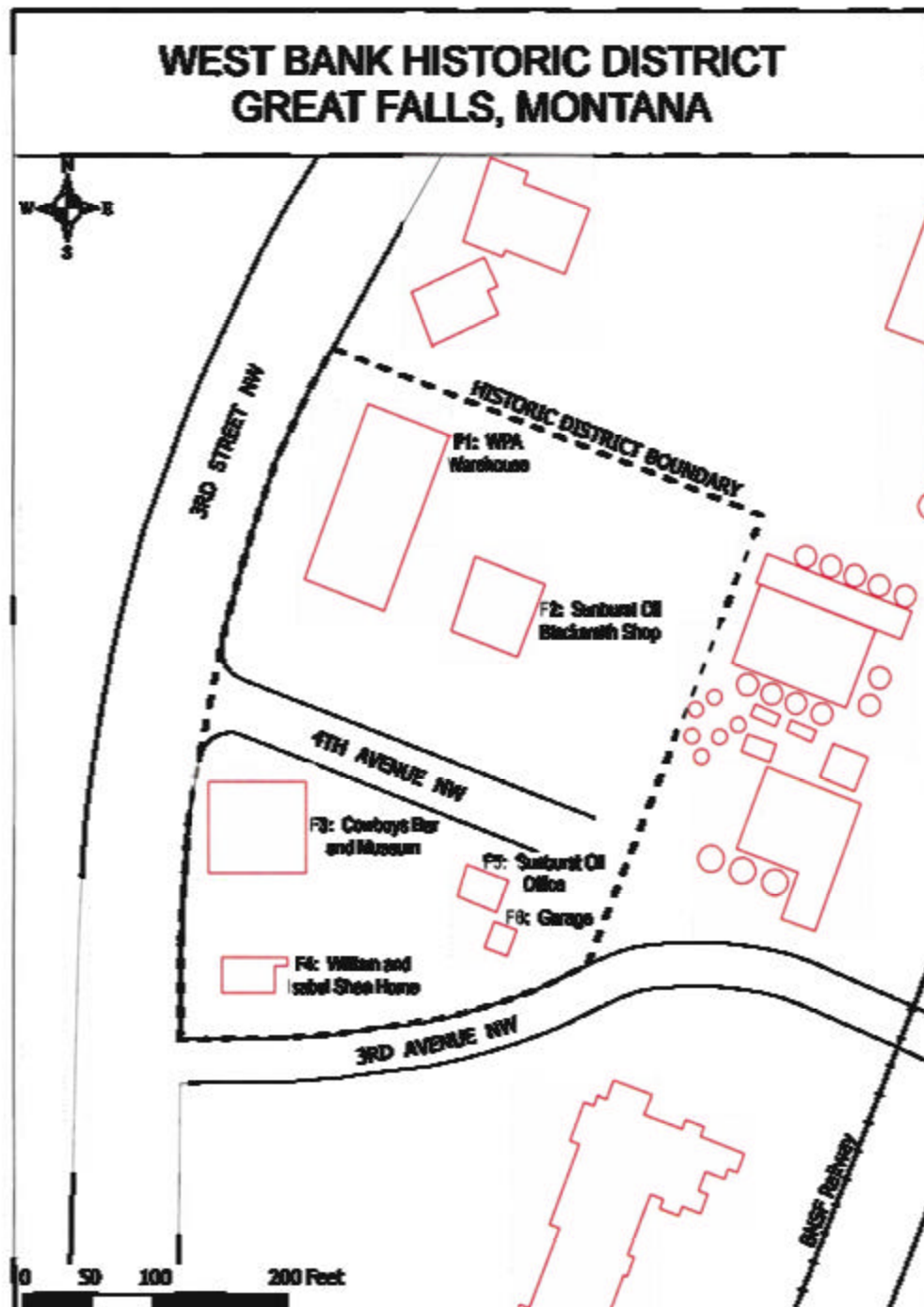
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